

Valuable error or clever fake? Some close calls

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers questions about error coins and their cousins—fake errors.

Q—I own a 1943 copper cent, not the normal zinc-plated-steel variety made during that war year. How can I determine if my coin is genuine?

—H.S., Chicago

A—First, see if a magnet attracts the piece. Pranksters often coat 1943 steel cents with copper, but such coins usually retain their magnetism.

If your coin passes that test [copper Lincolns are not magnetic], then check the date—especially the final number—under high magnification. Many 1943 copper Lincolns actually are 1945s or 1948s with skillfully altered digits.

If you are still convinced that the coin is authentic, take it to a coin dealer or other expert for a more thorough examination. Remember, there are at least 10,000 fakes in existence for each genuine [and exceedingly rare] 1943 copper cent made in error.

Q—I was looking through my Roosevelt dimes for a 1982 no-mint-mark dime [which I didn't have], but I found dimes from 1965 through 1979 without mint marks. Is that unusual?

—E.A., Chicago

A—Absolutely not because 1980 was the first year that Uncle Sam put a "P" on dimes produced in Philadelphia; before then, Philly-made dimes carried no mint mark. Your coins are normal specimens, worth just their face value.

Q—After four months of searching I found a 1983 double-die cent. However, only three letters are doubled on the tails side ["cen" in the word "cent"] while the others look normal. Have I hit the jackpot?

—L.P., Elgin

A—You own what collectors call a "poor man's doubled die" that retails for less than \$1, a far cry from the \$125-and-up price for a "real thing." The doubling on your coin probably resulted from an overly polished die [abrasives used in polishing can cut grooves in selected parts of the design] or from a coining machine that wobbled slightly as it created your cent.

Just one defective die produced the prized collectibles. On those errors, doubling is visible in all parts of the tails-side design.